

## ***Students with Mild Mental Retardation Participating in Recess***

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### ***Abstract***

The participation of a student with mild mental retardation in recess can often be both challenging and rewarding for the student and teacher. This paper will address common characteristics of students with mild mental retardation and present basic solutions to improve the experience of these students in the recess setting. Initially the definition and prevalence of the disability will be presented. This will be followed by a discussion of the disability for an individual in the classroom, including appropriate teaching methods and lastly possible challenges and solutions for children with mild mental retardation in the recess setting. Lastly, specific methods of proactively including a student with mild mental retardation in a basketball-related recess activity will be discussed.

### **Definition and Prevalence of Mild Mental Retardation**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that children who are determined to have mental retardation receive special education services if the disorder affects the educational performance of the child. Mental retardation, according to IDEA is defined as follows:

...significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently [at the same time] with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. (CFR §300.7 (a) 9) (IDEA, 2004).

An individual with Mild Mental Retardation usually is in the 55-69 IQ range. Children with this disorder are mildly educable and are able to acquire functional academic skills through special education. As adults these individuals can usually maintain themselves at least semi-independently in a community (Glossary of Education, 2010).

The number of individuals with mental retardation is often debated due to items such as methods of assessment and criteria. However, it is to be noted that approximately 2% of school-age children in the United States have been determined to have some form of mental retardation. Of this number, the majority of these children are said to have mild mental retardation, as opposed to moderate or severe mental retardation (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2010). Keeping this fact in mind, one can roughly say that 1% of school-age children have mild mental retardation.

## **Students With Mild Mental Retardation in the Classroom**

Working with a student with mild mental retardation can often be challenging and rewarding for both the student and the teacher. This is true because of common characteristics often exhibited by the student and inadequate training by the teacher. Students with mild mental retardation often exhibit the following characteristics:

- The child may be 2-4 years behind in cognitive development, which could include math, language, short attention spans, memory difficulties and delays in speech development.
- Social relationships are often impacted. The child may exhibit behavior problems, be immature, display some obsessive/compulsive behaviors, lack the understanding of verbal/non verbal clues and will often have difficulty following rules and routines.
- Adaptive Skill Implications (Everyday skills for functioning) are often impacted. These children may be clumsy, use simple language with short sentences, have minimal organization skills and will need reminders about hygiene - washing hands, brushing teeth (life skills), etc.
- Weak Confidence is often demonstrated by MID students. These students are often easily frustrated and require opportunities to improve self esteem. Lots of support will usually be needed to ensure they try new things and take risks in learning (About.com: Special Education, 2010).

## **Teaching Methods for an Individual with Mental Retardation in the Classroom**

In response to characteristics of a student with mild mental retardation that are often present, a variety of classroom instructional techniques should be used. It is important to note that many of these solutions are often considered quality teaching techniques for all children.

- Keep distractions and transitions to a minimum.
- Provide an encouraging, supportive learning environment that will capitalize on student success and self esteem.
- Ensure that routines and rules are consistent (About.com: Special Education, 2010).
- Use simple, short, uncomplicated sentences to ensure maximum understanding.
- Repeat instructions or directions frequently and ask the student if further clarification is necessary.
- Help the student develop appropriate social skills to support friend and peer relationships.
- Teach organizational skills.
- Use behavior contracts and reinforce positive behavior if necessary.
- Be patient! Assist with coping strategies (About.com: Special Education, 2010)

## **Possible Challenges for Children with Mild Mental Retardation in the Recess Setting**

Keeping the characteristics and solutions for children in the classroom in mind it is important to now note that special considerations must be made to properly instruct a student with mild mental retardation in the recess setting. This is true as a result of the unique challenges in the recess setting. One main reason why this is the case is a result of the safety concerns that are unique to the recess setting. Failure to address many of the characteristics of a student with mild mental retardation such as delayed cognitive development, short attention spans, and memory difficulties could result in safety concerns as a result of poor decision making.

Another concern for children with mild mental retardation in the recess setting could include a lack of social skills. Characteristics such as delays in speech development, behavior problems, immaturity, obsessive/compulsive behaviors, lack of understanding of verbal and non-verbal clues, weak confidence and difficulty following rules and routines can lead to difficulties forming appropriate social relationship, often considered a main objective of the recess setting.

## **Possible Solutions to Challenges for Children with Mild Mental Retardation in the Recess Setting**

In terms of the recess setting one important objective to remember for students with mild mental retardation – or for any child - is to develop an environment that is cooperative. Such a cooperative environment would seem to lead to a high comfort level for everyone and in turn seem to be beneficial to children with, and without mild mental retardation.

The following chart notes possible specific challenges associated with children with mild mental retardation and possible solutions to these challenges in recess. It is important to remember that not all of these characteristics are present in all individuals with mild mental retardation and not all of these solutions will be successful. They do, however, represent a solid foundation. It is also extremely important to note that many of the solutions that are suggested for one characteristic are also suggested for other characteristics. The reader should be particularly conscious of this as good educational techniques often cross-over into addressing multiple characteristics. Lastly, it should be noted that all these characteristics are found in all quality teaching, for students with and without disabilities. Following the chart a specific case incorporating modification procedures for including a student with mild mental retardation in a basketball-related recess activity will be addressed.

Table 1: Possible Solutions to Challenges for Children with Mild Mental Retardation  
in the Recess Setting

Characteristics of students with mild mental retardation in recess	Possible Solutions in the Recess Setting

Delayed cognitive development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep instructions as simple as possible to eliminate possible confusion or forgetting</li> <li>• Repeat, review, and get feedback from the student whenever possible to ensure that instructions are understood</li> <li>• Assign the student a buddy for certain activities who can help with questions dealing with orientation (Center For Educational Networking, 2005)</li> <li>• Avoid indirect communication; instead make instructions clear and succinct</li> <li>• Make sure you don't cover material, such as directions, too quickly - give pauses for students to catch up or give feedback; restate information emphasizing key points and be careful not to introduce too many new words at a time</li> <li>• Have structured recess activities</li> <li>• Have peers demonstrate activities to reemphasize key points</li> <li>• Keep waiting to a minimum</li> <li>• Be alert to peer problems or harassment associated</li> </ul>
Short attention spans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep instructions as simple as possible to shorten needed time for attention and eliminate possible confusion</li> <li>• Give instructions to the student in small groups, or one-one-one, to avoid distractions</li> <li>• Assign the student a buddy for certain activities who can help student stay focused (Center For Educational Networking, 2005)</li> <li>• Have structured recess activities</li> <li>• Keep waiting to a minimum</li> <li>• Remember to keep students' attention by using gestures and by providing cues and concrete materials such as diagrams (Joy, 2010)</li> </ul>
Memory difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep instructions as simple as possible to eliminate possible forgetting</li> <li>• Give instructions to the student in small groups, or one-one-one, to avoid distractions</li> <li>• Repeat, review, and get feedback from the student whenever possible to ensure that instructions are understood and remembered</li> <li>• Assign the student a buddy for certain activities who can help with questions dealing with</li> </ul>

	<p>orientation and remind student of important information (Center For Educational Networking, 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid indirect communication; instead make instructions clear and succinct</li> <li>• Make sure you don't cover material, such as directions, too quickly - give pauses for students to catch up or give feedback; restate information emphasizing key points and be careful not to introduce too many new words at a time</li> <li>• Have structured recess activities</li> <li>• Keep waiting to a minimum</li>   <li>• Remember to keep students' attention by using gestures and by providing cues and concrete materials such as diagrams (Joy, 2010)</li> </ul>
Delays in speech development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid indirect communication; instead make instructions clear and succinct</li> <li>• Have structured recess activities</li> <li>• Allow the student time to demonstrate and explain, in own words, the activity</li> </ul>
Behavior problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give instructions to the student in small groups, or one-one-one, to avoid distractions that may lead to confusion and behavior problems stemming from lack of confidence</li> <li>• Keep waiting to a minimum</li>   <li>• Be alert to peer problems or harassment</li>   <li>• Position the student close to peers who can serve as a model for behavior</li> <li>• Try to reduce triggers to behavior problems, if possible</li> <li>• Avoid recess activities in which the student could easily become embarrassed - such as difficult activities as this may lead to unpleasant emotions</li> <li>• Avoid competitive recess activities in which the student may win or lose, such as one-on-one activities, as this may also lead to unpleasant emotions</li> <li>• Do not allow students to "pick teams" as this may lead to embarrassment</li> <li>• Provide choices for the students during recess, including when disciplining</li> <li>• Confer privately with the student so they are not</li> </ul>

	"stuck" to figure out some "graceful exit" from conflicting situations without attracting peer attention (SchoolBehavior.com, 2009)
Immaturity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign the student a mature buddy for certain activities who can serve as a model for behavior</li> <li>• Have structured recess activities – if the student knows what to do he/she will likely perform the desired task</li> <li>• Schedule time for rest during class especially when attention seems to be a problem (Center For Educational Networking, 2005)</li> <li>• Keep waiting to a minimum</li> <li>• Be alert to peer problems or harassment</li> <li>• Position the student close to peers who can serve as a model for behavior</li> <li>• Try to reduce triggers to behavior problems, if possible</li> <li>• Avoid recess activities in which the student could easily become embarrassed - such as difficult activities as this may lead to unpleasant emotions</li> <li>• Avoid competitive recess activities in which the student may win or lose, such as one-on-one activities, as this may also lead to unpleasant emotions</li> <li>• Modify motor activities if they are determined to be too difficult (e.g. walking instead of running)- success in one activity will ultimately breed success in future activities</li> <li>• Do not allow students to "pick teams" as this may lead to embarrassment</li> </ul>
Obsessive/compulsive behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be alert to peer problems or harassment</li> <li>• Try to reduce triggers- such as peers- to compulsive rituals, if possible</li> </ul>
Lack of understanding of verbal and non-verbal clues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep instructions as simple as possible to eliminate possible confusion</li> <li>• Repeat, review, and get feedback from the student whenever possible to ensure that instructions are understood</li> <li>• Assign the student a buddy for certain activities who can serve as a model</li> <li>• Avoid indirect communication; instead make instructions clear and succinct</li> <li>• Make sure you don't cover material, such as</li> </ul>

	<p>directions, too quickly - give pauses for students to catch up or give feedback; restate information emphasizing key points and be careful not to introduce too many new words at a time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have structured recess activities</li> <li>• Have peers demonstrate activities</li> <li>• Remember to keep students' attention by using gestures and by providing cues and concrete materials such as diagrams (Joy, 2010)</li> </ul>
Weak confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep instructions as simple as possible to eliminate possible confusion and possible leading to lack of confidence</li> <li>• Repeat, review, and get feedback from the student whenever possible to ensure that instructions are understood, hopefully leading to more confidence</li> <li>• Have structured recess activities</li> <li>• Be alert to peer problems or harassment</li> <li>• Position the student close to peers who can serve as a model for behavior</li> <li>• Avoid recess activities in which the student could easily become embarrassed - such as difficult activities as this may lead to unpleasant emotions</li> <li>• Avoid competitive recess activities in which the student may win or lose, such as one-on-one activities, as this may also lead to unpleasant emotions</li> <li>• Modify motor activities if they are determined to be too difficult (e.g. walking instead of running)- success in one activity will ultimately breed success in future activities</li> <li>• Do not allow students to "pick teams" as this may lead to embarrassment</li> </ul>
Difficulty following rules and routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep instructions as simple as possible to eliminate possible confusion or forgetting</li> <li>• Give instructions to the student in small groups, or one-one-one, to avoid distractions</li> <li>• Repeat, review, and get feedback from the student whenever possible to ensure that instructions are understood</li> <li>• Assign the student a buddy for certain activities who can serve as a model for behavior</li> <li>• Avoid indirect communication; instead make instructions clear and succinct</li> <li>• Have structured recess activities</li> <li>• Schedule time for rest during class especially when</li> </ul>

	<p>attention seems to be a problem (Center For Educational Networking, 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep waiting to a minimum</li> <li>• Remember to keep students' attention by using gestures and by providing cues and concrete materials such as diagrams (Joy, 2010)</li> <li>• Position the student close to peers who can serve as a model for behavior</li> <li>• Practice turn taking</li> </ul>
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### **Methods of Including a Student with Mild Mental Retardation in a Basketball-Related Recess Activity**

For the purpose of discussion of including a student with mild mental retardation in recess, the students will be participating in a simple activity in which students are divided into groups of approximately five, each group at its own basket. The groups will be shooting, one student at a time, from marked spots on the floor. The other four group members obtain the rebound, pass to each other, and back to the shooter. Each shooter will shoot for one minute before rotating to another shooter. The skills that will be practiced are shooting, rebounding, and passing.

To appropriately include an individual with mild mental retardation in the activity the following modifications should be made. Directions should be given to the student on a one-to-one basis, in simple terms. This should be followed by a demonstration by other students and a “walk-through” for the student with mild mental retardation. The walk-through should consist of the teacher directing the student in terms of the protocol to be followed such as the sequence of activities to be performed during the drill. In addition, the student should be placed in the smallest group, chosen by the teacher, so as to reduce waiting time. This group should include students for which the child has been shown to successfully participate. Also, the activity should be modified to guarantee success – possibly lowering basket, using a lighter ball, or allowing the student to take closer shots. It is important to remember that during the activity the student should be continuously observed so as to determine his/her success. The student should also be given a time to rest if he/she is continually falling off task. This will hopefully be a very short period.

### **Conclusion**

The participation of a student with mild mental retardation in recess can often be challenging and rewarding for both the student and teacher. The rewards can manifest themselves in the ability of the teacher to guarantee the safety of all students in an instructionally sound environment. This paper has hopefully addressed some basic concerns and solutions to improve the recess setting of students with mild mental retardation.

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